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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the initial planning and building of a communication arts complex at Kent State University in Ohio and presents the author's observations about the complex ten years later. The physical dimensions of the complex are described in detail, including the facts that the original plan allowed for 10,000 students and that by 1973 the student population of Kent State University was in excess of 21,000. (TS)

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BUILDING A COMMUNICATION ARTS COMPLEX: THOUGHTS TEN YEARS AFTER

L. LeRoy Cowperthwaite

In February 1956 President Bowman of Kent State University sent us a memo saying that capital funds were being requested for the construction of new quarters to house the Schools of Speech and Music. His memo asked us for a statement of needs expressed in terms of kinds of space, approximate square footage, and contemplated program utilization. A faculty committee set to work that spring describing and projecting such needs. (The President's memo also stipulated that we were to plan for an anticipated student body of 10,000 by 1966 -- ten years later. The student body numbered about 6,000 at the time.) We had a faculty of 16 and about 200 undergraduate and a dozen graduate (masters level) majors spread through the four divisions of the School, namely, Rhetoric and Public Address, Broadcasting, Speech Pathology and Audiology, and Theatre.

Following some quick site visits to other campuses and a self-assessment of our needs as best we could project them, we submitted our statement to the President that summer. Since the new biennium budget included monies for architect's fees, we began in September what was to be a two-year love affair with William Scott, of Mellonbrook, Foley and Scott Architects of Berea, Ohio. Since Berea is only a 30 minute drive from the Kent State Campus, there were many and frequent sessions with Mr. Scott and his assistants as our plans took the form of architect's preliminary sketches and drawings. All in all, we were pleased with the fruits of our labor. Since the 1958-60 biennial budget contained the promised capital funds, we broke ground in October 1958. Another two years were spent in eager anticipation as we

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watched those blueprint lines take on the form of bricks and mortar. Because our old home was needed for others on our rapidly growing campus, we moved into a part of our new quarters in June 1960 before the entire complex--to be known as the Speech & Music Center--could be completed. Dedication ceremonies were held in October, almost two years to the day from groundbreaking.

Yes, we had planned well for a student body of 10,000. When we moved in, a faculty of 21 could luxuriate in office space designed for 30. Nor could we begin to utilize all that air-conditioned classroom space. So for a while the departments of sociology, political science, English, and the College of Education taught classes in our building.

The Speech and Hearing Clinic occupied a 53-room wing of its own fully equipped with faculty offices, four anachoid rooms for hearing testing, ten pairs of clinic rooms with one-way vision mirrors, a children's room equipped with amplification and even tot-size toilet facilities; a large laboratory-classroom equipped with permanently installed tables with electrical outlets and cabinetry and a refrigerator for teaching aids and clinical specimens; six examination rooms equipped with plinths and running water; a shop for equipment maintenance and storage, a clinic library, student work room with adjoining kitchenette facilities, and a large secretarial and reception area equipped with lounge furniture for waiting patients.

In addition to its own suite of offices, the Theatre Division had the exclusive use of a 526-seat theatre with continental seating, a stage 102 x 45 feet; 68-foot grid, 70-foot proscenium, 60 sets of lines, 32 x 16 foot trapped area, and what the late Tyrone Guthrie called, when he saw it, a "bastard thrust" stage apron fronted by an orchestra pit. The Theatre was equipped with a stereo sound system and the very latest Kliegel-built silicon dimmer/remote console lighting with a patch panel for 50 sets of dimmers.

Adjoining the auditorium were a ready room, green room with kitchenette, make-up room, men's and women's dressing rooms with showers and lockers, and costume construction area. Unfortunately, scene construction and painting rooms were put under the stage. The reason was that, at the last minute before bids were advertized, the state Architect said that funds were not adequate to do the entire job as planned. He ruled that alternate bids would be requested. You guessed it: We were forced to go with the alternate, which omitted an entire wing containing the shop area designed for wagon staging, a versatile experimental theatre, and offices for the technical staff.

The Broadcasting Division (now called Telecommunications) also occupied its own three-story wing. The first floor consisted of two Television studios, one 60 x 40 and the other 35 x 20 feet, with adjoining control room, service areas, and staff offices. The second floor housed all the "guts" of the television operation, video tape recorders, film chains, monitors, video-tape storage, technicians offices and repair shop. The third floor contained three radio studios including a large recording studio for WKSU-FM and AM, a classroom studio, faculty-staff offices, radio engineering shop, record library and newsroom.

It wasn't long, incidentally, before we commandeered what was intended as basement storage space under the broadcasting wing for a 100-seat experimental theatre, rooms for film and video-tape processing and editing, equipment repair, TV art shop and a student assistant bullpen.

The Rhetoric and Public Address (now called Rhetoric and Communication) Division occupied its own suite of offices in the large 3-story classroom wing of the Speech and Music Center. Specialized space for this division initially consisted of a sizeable forensic area equipped in parlimentary

fashion with a stage at one end.

Remember that I said earlier that we were instructed to plan for a student body of 10,000. By the time we occupied our new quarters in the fall of 1960, Kent State had a student population in excess of 8,000 and demographic predictions for rapid growth. You can guess the rest: By 1972 Kent State's student population had peaked in excess of 21,000. The School of Speech regular full time faculty numbered 40. Our undergraduate majors had reached over 900, and the graduate program had grown beyond our wildest expectations. We were suffering the pangs of cramped space before our building was ten years old!

But that isn't the whole story by any means! Could we have had that crystal ball back in 1958, we would have planned for:

(1) An accelerated growth of our graduate programs, including the inauguration of a Ph.D. program in 1968;

(2) A dramatic shift in research methodology in communication theory and process--a shift requiring specialized facilities heretofore unknown;

(3) A snowballing of interest in telecommunications, particularly instructional and closed circuit TV, cablevision, and now public broadcasting.

At a time when the leveling off of college enrollments generally puts the brakes on capital funding for new structures and building additions, how do you accommodate these unforseen needs? Renovation and occupancy of space vacated by others become your only solutions. Hence, the past three years have witnessed:

(1) Conversion of a defunct forensics area to a multi-media experimental classroom/research laboratory for the Division of Rhetoric and Communication;

(2) Conversion of our large radio recording studio to a third television laboratory;

(3) Dividing of two general classrooms into seminar rooms;

(4) Conversion of a third classroom into a suite of faculty offices;

(5) Having exhausted the possibilities of conversion and division, we sought space elsewhere.

(a) When our new library was completed, we acquired 45,000 square feet of space in the old library building, where we have constructed three experimental theatres--thrust, proscenium and arena--with contiguous production and rehearsal areas; theatre prop storage space; a speech science laboratory; a language development laboratory; a telecommunications library; office space for teaching assistants; and 3 additional classrooms.

(b) When the state authorities decided after ten years that we were in violation of the fire code by housing people in the basement under the broadcasting wing, we moved the entire Telecommunications faculty and teaching assistant staff to the fifth floor of a nearby high-rise dormitory so that we could use their former offices for video-tape and film facilities, TV art shop, engineering services, etc.

What words of wisdom, then, can we who have been through the mill give to you who are contemplating construction to accommodate what we have termed a "communication arts complex"? Or, to put it another way, if we had it to do over again, what primary considerations would guide our planning? I should like to suggest six:

(1) We would be sure that we tuned into the administration's wave length on long range planning, particularly anticipated growth and development and where our programs fit into the overall scheme of things.

(2) We would arrange to work closely with the architect through the stage of preliminary drawings and sketches, making sure that he knows how spaces are to be used, what they must accommodate, what essential properties, such as acoustic, they must possess to support both instruction and research.

(3) We would be sure to know our specialized area needs, such as laboratories, clinics, experimental theatres and the like, using consultants where we lack staff expertise.

(4) We would make sure that the final plans give priorities to specialized space needs, and we wouldn't economize on faculty and teaching assistant office space.

(5) We would afford the luxury of a faculty/staff lounge.

(6) And when it's all done and you've moved in, don't look back and wish you had planned differently; for in the words of Paul Harvey, one of Chicago's foremost news commentators, "There's no use worrying. Nothing's going to turn out all right."